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AUTHOR Donelson, Kenneth L.
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ABSTRACT

This list of 25 short films represents what is believed to be a basic list of films for the high school English department. For each of the films. information is given as to the distributor, the running time, whether it is in black and white or color, the rental price, a summary, possible audience, a few strengths and weaknesses, some possible thematic units it might fit into, and a few questions students and teachers might wish to consider in talking about a film. All of the films, with the exception of the first listed, are arranged in alphabetical order. Addresses of film distributors complete the listing. (Author/DB)

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A Basic List of Twenty-Five Films for the Secondary Schools

*KENNETH L. DONELSON

As any English teacher knows who skims through issues of *Media and Methods* or makes a slight effort at keeping informed about new methods and new content, films have made the scene in the classroom. Indeed, for many teachers, films *are* the scene. Questions like "Shall we use film?" or "How can we justify film in English?" have been replaced by "What films can we use?" or "Shall we use feature films or short films?"

Feature length films have at least two disadvantages; rental costs and time. Feature films are expensive and discovering new and worthwhile films that haven't yet skyrocketed in cost through heavy demand gets tougher each year. The time when teachers could rent films like *Mickey One* or *Treasure of the Sierra Madre* or *Odd Man Out* or *The Maltese Falcon* or *The Magnificent Ambersons* for a pittance is over, a price we have to pay for the successful jobs some teachers have done in educating others to the satisfactions of using films. Costs do vary from one distributor to another and anyone considering feature films should check catalogues carefully (*Cool Hand Luke* can be rented for $47.50 or $65.00 or $75.00 or $92.50 or $125.00 depending on which distributor a teacher wishes to use; *Death of a Salesman* rental costs from six distributors are $16.50, $20.00, $25.00, $30.00, $32.50, and $37..50; and *The Mouse That Roared* has at least eight different prices, $24.50, $25.00, $27.50, $30.00, $33.75, $35.00, $37.50, and $52,50. But long films and the short English department budget do not go well together. Time may be even a more significant factor in discouraging the use of feature films. Class periods usually run something like 40 to 55 minutes, but feature films usually run something like 90 to 120 minutes. True, films can be broken into two or three parts, but movies are rarely improved in the process, and they are usually damaged, often ruined.

Some schools have found ways of showing films at one time through modular scheduling or juggling class periods, but the time necessary to show feature films represents a very serious problem. Neither rental cost nor time is an insurmountable obstacle, but they are dilemmas.

Short films are something else. Few good short films are free, but most are considerably less expensive than feature films, and by definition short films take up only a limited part of the class period, allowing time to view and discuss and then view again. If fewer books and articles are readily found on short films than feature films, some good things are available. Books like David Sohn's *Film: The Creative Eye* (Dayton, Ohio: Geo. A. Pflaum, 1970) in which he comments on and analyzes seventeen short films distributed by Pyramid Films; Robert Heyer and Anthony

*Kenneth Donelson is in the English Department at Arizona State University.

Meyer's *Discovery in Film* (Paramus, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1969) where the authors comment on the content and class value of more than seventy short films; and William Kuhns' *Themes* (Dayton, Ohio: Geo. A. Pflaum, 1968) which discusses more than eighty short films (Supplement One for *Themes* adds thirty additional films). Teachers interested in short films should get catalogues from many distributors, among them Contemporary Films, CCM Films, Pyramid Films, Rembrandt Films, and Mass Media Ministries (the latter is the most critical and interesting of all catalogues of short films); a short list of distributors and addresses is at the end of this article. Though many magazines occasionally discuss short films, the most helpful journals which regularly discuss these films are *Media and Methods, Film News* and *Mass Media Ministries Newsletter.*

Obviously, the best way to learn about films and to build a repertoire of good films for particular class situations is to attend film festivals as often as possible. Joining local or state film groups will give teachers the opportunity to see many short films, to learn something about the process of filmmaking, and to talk to student and professional filmmakers. But in 1971, too many English teachers remain ignorant of the wealth of good to excellent short films. A fast skimming through Ron Epple's synopses and critical comments in "A Great New List of Short Films" in the March 1971 *Media and Methods* will point out to most teachers how very few short films they recognize by title, much less have seen.

The following list of twenty-five short films represents what I believe to be a *basic* list of films for the high school English department. They are personal favorites of mine, but each film can be defended as a valid and provocative and entertaining film statement by a filmmaker who cared about something deeply. These twenty-five films are useable in many ways in English classes, but none of them are those ubiquitous educational films we all abhor—films like "The Way to God, Republicanism, and the Good Life Through Grammar" or "Our Friend, the Sentence Diagram."

For each of the twenty-five films I've listed the distributor, the running time, whether it is in color or black and white (b&w), the rental price, a summary, possible audience, a few strengths and weaknesses, some possible thematic units it might fit into, and a few questions students and teachers might wish to consider in talking about a film. Except for the first film, which is the single basic film for any class involved in film study, films are arranged alphabetically.

1. "Basic Film Terms: A Visual Dictionary," Pyramid, 15 min., color, $18.00. Sheldon Renan's dictionary of the film, using a young man doing his first film, the shooting he does, and the off-screen narration of Ralph Story, illustrate terms like storyboard, establishing shot, fast motion shot, rack focus shot, dolly shot, voice over sound, dissolve, jump cut, freeze frame, wipe, and superimposition. For any student anyplace interested in anything about film. A painless way to learn a tremendous amount of film information fast, though the hockey shooting script which takes up the last three minutes or so may irk some teachers.

2. "Ares Contre Atlas," CCM, 7½ min., color, $10.00. Five sight

gags about the stupidity and horror of war by Manuel Otero which may remind viewers of Roadrunner cartoons and a horror film and a John Wayne war film all at once. A very funny and chilling film. The film demands a fairly mature and sophisticated audience, but ninth or tenth graders would react to it. Short and powerful and lacking any weakness I can determine. Would fit units on War, Man's Inhumanity to Man, Disaster, Black Humor, or Comedy. Why does the humor make the anti-war theme even more horrible? Is the use of the "Hallelujah Chorus" in the last episode sacrilegious?

3. "Dream of Wild Horses," Contemporary, 9 min., color, $12.50. Wild horses of the Camargue area in France are filmed against a surrealistic background of fire and sea and sand and mud. A lovely and poetic film which would appeal in many ways to almost any student from fourth grade up. A consistently lovely film which marries music and camera work throughout. Units like Mood Literature, Escape, Animals, and Symbolism. Why does the filmmaker use slow motion? Is the action of the horses natural or are men making them perform? Is the film allegorical?

4. "The Fat and the Lean," Pyramid, 15 min., b&w, $18.00. Roman Polanski's parable of an oppressed young man who is made happier by being granted some apparent freedom. A Brecht-like tale of interest mostly to mature students aware of today's problems and symbolic literature about those problems. The film may be too long and too repetitive for some, but many students and teachers would find it challenging and worthwhile, especially in units like Man's Inhumanity to Man, How Funny Is Comedy? The Nature of Slavery, and Man's Need for Security. How would the film be different if it were in color? What does the goat represent? Are bondage and freedom really mutually exclusive terms?

5. "Genesis," CCM, 6 min., color, $10.00. Written and directed by Jane Merglova, this film is a cynical picturing of the creation of a man, from a body stamped by machine through assembly line production of his head and heart and clothes and his boutonniere to the final shot of his head being deftly removed by a guillotine after roughly ten seconds of life. The film would likely confuse many younger students, but it would fit units for older kids like Mechanization and Man, Man's purpose on Earth, Dreams and Reality, and Vanity, All is Vanity. A succinct movie which briefly and cleverly makes its point. Why is the boutonniere scarlet? What, besides death, does the guillotine represent? Does the man's appearance remind students of anyone or anything they've seen recently on TV?

6. "The Hand," Contemporary, 19 min., color, $25.00. Jiri Trnka's puppet film about an artisan who makes pots and an oppressive hand who wants the artisan to make statues celebrating the hand. A serious film about oppression and slavery, probably of interest to students from tenth grade up. Possibly a trifle long and the symbols may belabor the obvious, but the animation is superb and the execution of story and camera work is excellent. Units might include Non-Verbal Communication, Integrity, The Struggle for Freedom, Justice, or Conformity. Who or what does the

hand represent? What restrictions can (should, may) be placed on an artist in his right to create whatever he wishes? How does a free or dictatorial society affect the artist?

7. "Help! My Snowman's Burning Down," Contemporary, 10 min., color, $15.00. Carson Davidson's satiric parable of a Twentieth Century Everyman. A well-dressed man sits fully-clothed in a bathtub, then opens a door into a bar where he is shocked by the overtures of a scantily clad young lady, and finally floats out to sea in his bathtub only to be sunk by a torpedo fired by a toy submarine. Some teachers may feel that the scantily attired young lady or the comedy of the absurd techniques demand that the audience be mature twelfth graders, though the film has been used with much younger children. A trifle long and sometimes quite obscure film, but all in all, a short comedy without parallel. Units like The Modern Everyman, Comedy of the Absurd, or Alienated Man. Why is the film set on a pier at the waterfront? In what ways is the man a hero or an anti-hero? What elements of the real world are paralleled in the comic or absurd situations?

8. "I've Got This Problem," CCM, 8 min., b&w, $10.00. In a stand-up coffee shop, a young man asks an attractive young woman to pass the sugar and thus begins a conversation starting with, "I've got this problem. . . ." An exercise in the ineffectuality and semantic gymnastics of most meaningless or meaningful attempts at human communication. Audiences from tenth grade up, though a working knowledge of some semantic principles would be helpful. The humor is subtle and the black and white camera work pointed and poignant, but the film may seem overlong to some viewers. Units might include Human Relations, Crap Detecting, Cliches, and The Problems of Communicating. Why does the girl end the film by asking the boy to kiss her? Do people really talk the way the boy and the girl do? What is the problem in the title?

9. "The Machine," Pyramid, 10 min., color, $15.00. Wolfgang Urchs' history of the development of machines, from the benevolent helper of man to the oppressive master of man. For mature audiences though it might be fun and even profitable to try it out with ninth or tenth graders. Sometimes enigmatic but always powerful and at the end frightening indeed. Topics it might go under would be Machines and Man, The Comedy of the Serious, What Controls Man's Destiny?, and Man and God and Man's Creations. How does the music fit or contrast with the film's theme? What do the intersecting lines represent at the beginning and ending of the film?

10. "The Moods of Surfing," Pyramid, 15 min., color, 15.00. The humor and excitement and grace and moods of many surfers along California and Hawaii's beaches. Almost anyone would love this film and be fascinated by the photography and music. Great color and fine music, though the cutting seems to have destroyed some of the unity of the film to establish the many different moods of surfing. The film would fit topics like The Sea and Its Many Effects on Man, Concrete Poetry, and Man and Nature. Would the natural sounds of surfing have been an improvement

over the musical background of the film? What is the basic appeal of surfing or other athletic or physical activities? How does the film involve the viewer?

11. "Munro," Rembrandt, 9 min., color, $12.50. A four-year old boy is drafted and tries vainly to get out of the army. Finally, a general recognizes the problem and Munro emerges a hero. A very funny and pointed satire which every student would like in some way. Based on the work of Jules Feiffer, this Academy Award winning cartoon could easily fit into units on War, The Military Mind, Modern Humor, The Real World Seen Through the Eyes of Children, and Man as a Product of a System. Why is the hero a very little boy of four rather than a ten-year old or older? What produces a system which could draft a four-year old boy and then be unwilling to recognize the goof? Do we already have such a system?

12. "Nahanni," Contemporary, 18 min., color, $8.50. Made by the Film Board of Canada, this simple and beautifully photographed film is about Albert Faille, age 73, who has seven times tried to reach gold at the headwaters of Nahanni River and fails in his eighth attempt. At the end of the film, Faille contemplates his defeat and vows to come back again, "I'll be dead or drowned before I quit." Of wide appeal to many students, with its picture of a lonely and puny man fighting vast and unconquerable nature. Units might include What Is Necessary for the Good Life?, Why Does Man Quest?, Survival, Conflict, Man's Dreams, Man and Nature, and Self Reliance. By the eighth trip up the Nahanni, is it really the gold that Faille is seeking? How far will people go to find their own El Dorado? How does the film help viewers to identify the old man?

13. "Neighbors," Contemporary, 9 min., color, $6.00. Two men, neighbors, find a beautiful flower growing on their boundary line, each wishes to possess the flower exclusively, and they fight to the death. The film might seem silly to some young people, but many kinds have watched individual or family squabbles develop over things just as trivial, and the compactness and brevity of the film drive home the point very well. Unit ideas would be War, Parables and Life, Conflict, The Things Man Will Fight and Die for, and Non-Verbal Communication. In what ways is the title ironic? Why are the two men and their possessions so similar? What trivia have led to disputes in man's history?

14. "No Reason to Stay," Contemporary, 28 min., b&w, $8.50. Christopher Wood, high school student, marches stolidly through boring classes and decides to quit school. A highly biased film about a young man who desperately wants a real education, not the garbage he's getting in his school. Students would applaud Chris and his decision, possibly for the wrong reasons, but in the hands of a sensitive teacher, this film could lead to some excellent discussion about the difference between what education is and what it could be. Biased and sometimes out and out preachy, the film holds together and seems much shorter than 28 minutes long. Units could be Rebellion, Man Against the Establishment, Thinking for Yourself, and What Is Education Supposed to Be? Would color have made the

film more effective than black and white? What kind of school would have made Chris happy? Is Chris wholly justified in his actions?

15. "The Question," Contemporary, 10 min., color, $12.50. A "?" falls near a little man, and he goes to a religious figure, a politician, an artist, a scientist, a financial expert, a psychiatrist, and a military figure to discover what the "?" means. Finding no answer to satisfy him, the little man meets a little lady and discovers love. Even young children might enjoy portions of the film, but ninth graders would probably be able to discuss the multiple meanings of the question mark. A trifle sentimental, the film would fit units like What Is Worth Knowing?, What Is Important?, Why Does Man Have the Intelligence to Ask About the Unknowable?

16. "The Rise and Fall of the Great Lakes," Pyramid, 17 min., color, $15.00. A recent film from the Film Board of Canada, and a humorous and painless lesson on geology and ecology as we see the birth of the Great Lakes and the beginning of their death caused by man's need to destroy and pollute. A trifle long, though where one would cut is questionable, but a really powerful and frightening story for many uses with many students. Is Man His Own Source of Destruction?, Are the Comedy Scenes Necessary to the Film?, and Man Versus Nature are a few unit topics. What is the purpose of comic situations? Is the ending optimistic or pessimistic?

17. "The Shooting Gallery," SIM, 6 min., color, $7.00. In a shooting gallery, a rouge-cheek wooden looking soldier fires at targets and sets a group of flat characters into motion. Finally, he fires at a target of a dancing couple, the first three-dimensional characters we've seen. Beginning their dance, they break free of their bonds and float upward, only to be shot down by the soldier and flattened before being stuck back in their proper place. Younger students might think the dancing and music odd or silly, but most students would like this film. Fine musical score and lovely color; the first part may seem extended to some. Oppression, Love, Freedom and Slavery, Man on the Assembly Line, and Society Molds Man are just a few unit topics for this film. What does the soldier represent? Why are the earlier targets flat and the dancing couple three-dimensional? Why does the music change to a minor key when the couple break loose?

18. "Sky Above," Pyramid, 9 min., color, $10.00. A young boy wanders around his area of the city, thinking of the wonders of nature in the forest and mountains and along the oceanshore. Viewers from the ninth grade up readily perceive the contrast between what he has and what he wants. Maybe a little too didactic but effective. Units might be such ideas as Man's Needs and Man's Realities, Nature and the City, and Man Dreams. Does the little boy represent anything more than just himself? Was the film melodramatic or realistic? Why does man continue to dream despite his surroundings?

19. "Starlight," Pyramid, 5 min., b&w with color, $10.00. The most non-linear of the 25 films, this is Bob Fulton's personal statement about the simple life and needs of some men. Beginning with some fast cut shots of the hurried and harried life of the city, Fulton cuts to a Tibetan wiseman,

his disciple, a man living alone, and then a series of very rapid shots of trees, mountains, water, and clouds, all with the starlight of our sun playing on them. Reactions from students will likely range from "I loved it" to "It gave me a headache." Fastcut shots and the multitude of images coming so rapidly may confuse many students, but it would easily play into units like How Much Land Does a Man Need?, Personal Values, The Influence of Oriental Thought, and The Place Makes the Man What He Is. Why does Fulton change from b&w to color about half way through the film? What statement about man and his life style is Fulton making by the fast cutting throughout the film? Is the film related to Emily's speech to the Stage Manager in the third act of Wilder's *Our Town*, "Do any human beings ever realize life while they live it?—every minute, every minute?"

20. "The String Bean," Contemporary, 17 min., b&w with color, $16.00. An old and very lonely French woman finds life and purpose in growing a stringbean. A simple and lovely and touching film which sounds foolish in summary but works with junior high students up to twelfth graders. As one ninth grader said, "That old woman, she got better looking by the end of the film," and she does because we start to care about her. Units might include Being Old and Being Young, Man's Spirit, Man Needs a Purpose to Live, and Alienation. Does the b&w alternating with color really work or does it belabor the obvious? What gives the old woman a purpose to live when workers kill her plant? Would the use of dialogue have helped the film?

21. "Toys," Contemporary, 8 min., color, $12.50. A Film Board of Canada release in which a group of children are gathered at a store window watching some war toys and the toys come alive, killing and maiming each other. Powerful message worth using with any group, and technically one of the best short films I've ever seen. War, Man's Inhumanity to Man, Children View the Adult World, Reality and Appearance, and The Macabre in the Commonplace are a few unit ideas. Why does the filmmaker use so many freezeframe shots of the children? How does the filmmaker try to convince the viewer that the toys represent more than toys?

22. Threshold," Pyramid, 25 min., color, $20.00. A young man is chased and killed by a lawman, for reasons never made clear, and between the shot and his death, the young man is granted by Death a brief time to spend with a lovely young girl. Audience? Any student in high school. A nice rock score with a slick production and more questions raised than answered. Why is the boy pursued? Is the girl real or a product of the boy's dreams of what could have been? Does the boy represent all of us? Units could be The Modern Everyman, Life and Death, Man's Need to Dream, and Tension Is a Necessary Part of Man's Existence.

23. "Turned On," Pyramid, 7 min., color, $10.00. A celebration of the excitement of life and sports in action scenes of car racing, surfing, skiing, boating, jeep riding. Students from junior high up would love this. The brevity and editing of the film allow no dead spots, and the film is consistently effective. Topics might include Why Is Excitement Necessary

for Some Men's Lives?, What Turns Man On?, and Sports Literature. Questions that might be asked, *if any are needed,* include why does man need excitement as part of his good life? Does the cutting from one point to another add to the thrill of the film or was it distracting?

24. "The Wall," Contemporary, 4 min., color, $10.00. Two men encounter an apparently insurmountable wall. One waits while the other man tries vainly to scale the wall or find some way around the wall. Finally, the searcher blasts through the wall, dies, and the watcher walks over the body and meets another wall. He sits, waiting for another person he can use to get through the next obstacle. Sophisticated and very cynical film which demands a mature audience. No weaknesses at all. Units might be People Who Use Other People, How Does Man Face Obstacles?, and Ways to Knock Down the Walls That Face Man. Does the color add to the value of the film? What is represented by the man who waits and the man who acts?

25. "Why Man Creates," Pyramid, 25 min., color, $15.00. Saul Bass' Academy Award winning film might better have been titled, "Why Does Man Create?" for the several parts of the film take up topics like man's creative processes through history, the process of creation, the role of the public in criticizing creations, the creator, and man in search of an idea. A film so rich in ideas and film techniques, there is no end to what a good teacher could do with it for any age group. The Creative Process, Why Does Man Have to Create?, Conflict, The Hero, Individuality, and Who Am I? are only a few of the many unit ideas a teacher could use. What inspires creativity? What stifles creativity? Why does man continue to search for years to find something he's not even sure others will care about? What is the idea behind the ping pong ball episode?

Of course, there are many good short films not listed, but an English department could make an impressive beginning in film use and film teaching with just these twenty-five short films. Ranging in running time from four minutes to twenty-eight minutes with an average of not quite twelve and a half minutes, and ranging in rental cost from $6.00 for "Neighbors" to $25.00 for "The Hand" with an average cost of $12.80 and a total budget of a little more than $300.00, this list could be used as a basic list of short films for virtually any secondary school.

Addresses of film distributors:

CCM (Crowell, Collier, and MacMillan) Films, 866 Third Avenue, New York, New York 10022.

Contemporary Films, McGraw Hill, 330 West 42nd Street, New York, New York 10036.

Pyramid Films, Box 1048, Santa Monica, California 90406.

Rembrandt Films, 267 West 25th Street, New York, New York 10001.

SIM Productions, Weston, Connecticut 06880.

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